



## PILATES POWER

*Keeping trim with pilates instructor Alona Vostrikova*

Shortly after graduating from a physical education university in Russia, Alona Vostrikova left for Beijing to learn Chinese. Now, twelve years later, she's mastered that language (along with English and Spanish), become a certified instructor and operates her own pilates studio in The Westin Chaoyang.

**What's the biggest misconception about yoga and pilates?** That pilates is like yoga – it's not. With yoga, you relax your muscles; with pilates, you strengthen them. With yoga, you stretch and overextend your joints; with pilates, you're working on improving and stabilizing your joints' ability. Even the breathing is different: with yoga, you inhale and exhale through the nose; with pilates, you breathe in through the nose and out the mouth, which helps to activate the lungs. In this city where the air quality is so poor, it is especially important to work on your breathing. We develop very short breath, even more so if we're under stress. Your lungs can only get as much air as you breathe and with pilates, you're

expanding your capacity to breathe.

**What's your philosophy on dieting to complement a fitness regimen?**

I have never dieted in my life. Since I was young, I've always lived by this Russian expression: Eat your breakfast alone, share your lunch with a friend, and give dinner to your enemy.

Breakfast is very important – all obese people skip breakfast. That's a huge mistake. Breakfast gives you energy and speeds up your metabolism for the day. You need to eat a lot of carbohydrates in the morning; an ideal breakfast would consist of half an orange or half a banana, half a glass of milk and a bowl of cereal or oatmeal. For lunch, you need to emphasize protein. If you have a guilty pleasure like sweets or cheese, this is the time to indulge. For dinner, fiber is the most important. Salads are good at this time to make you feel full but

not fat – you can incorporate a bit of protein, but no carbs or else your stomach will give you bad dreams all night.

**Lots of men seem skeptical about taking up yoga and pilates. Why do you think that is, and what do you want to say to them?**

Okay, guys don't have strong transverses abdominis muscles [abs that wrap like a belt to your lower back] like women. It's physiology. Women have them to help them carry babies when they're pregnant. Men don't need it. So even if they have a six-pack from going to the gym, they still might not have this muscle. That's why they so often suffer from lower back pain – it means these muscles are too loose. When you strengthen your abs, you're also making your lower back stronger.

Many men think, "Oh, pilates is easy, it's only for girls." That's a huge misconception – if anything, they need it even more than women. After they try out a class, they realize how hard pilates really is. They just don't have the same ability as women – they may be better in strength and can lift something heavy, but women tend to be better in endurance. That's why I really admire the men who come to my classes – I know it's so much harder for them. Right now my classes are probably only about 15 percent men, half of which are boyfriends and husbands. The girls drag them in and eventually the guys get addicted, just like everyone else!

**Alona Pilates Studio.** Daily 9am-9.00pm. 5/F, Heavenly Spa in Westin Chaoyang, 1 Xinyuan Nanlu, Chaoyang District. (139 1029 0260) [www.alonastudiobeijing.com](http://www.alonastudiobeijing.com) 朝阳区金茂北京威斯汀大饭店5层天梦水疗内

Interview by Tiffany Wang

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